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Mladić's Funeral: A Skillfully Prepared and Synchronized Pageant of the State, Military, and Church

The image of Serbia seen in Belgrade these days has caught by surprise a world that for years tolerated the glorification of war criminals, particularly Ratka Mladić. The tens of thousands of people at his funeral, accompanied by state honors and the participation of Army of Republika Srpska veterans, show that the fundamental attitude toward Mladić has not changed. On the contrary, what was long confined to the margins of society has now received a massive and public manifestation. Four buses of demobilized members of the Army of Republika Srpska arrived in an organized manner from Banja Luka, further demonstrating how much this event transcended the framework of a private funeral.

However, this is not just a story about Ratko Mladić. This is also a story about the consequences of a years-long policy of tolerating nationalist narratives in Serbia and the region. For years, the West watched as individuals legally convicted of the gravest war crimes were rehabilitated and glorified, while simultaneously speaking of Serbia's European perspective, regional stability, and Belgrade's "constructive" role. What international officials treat today as a shock and an incident is actually the direct consequence of their own long-standing calculations. Western diplomacy deliberately chose illusory stability over genuine democratization, turning a blind eye to the celebration of war criminals while conducting closed-door talks about partnership.

During this period, the concept of the "Serbian World" was developing. Although international actors mostly did not treat this concept as a formal political project, but rather as harmless rhetoric for domestic use, its core ideas—about a special connection between Serbia, Republika Srpska, and Serbs in the region—became increasingly visible in the political and public sphere. While the world remained silent and looked the other way, this concept erased the boundaries between cultural cooperation and political integration step by step.

Precisely because of this, everything surrounding Mladić's death and funeral cannot be viewed as a spontaneous outburst of emotion or an unforeseen excess. On the contrary, it was a skillfully prepared and synchronized pageant in which the state, the military, and the church acted together on the same task—the glorification of a war criminal. Each of these institutions had its own clear role in a performance aimed at rehabilitating the policies of the 1990s and officially legitimizing what had been built in the shadows for years.

This massive manifestation, organized with logistical support and the highest state and religious honors, served as the ideal stage for sending a clear and unequivocal message: Serbia and Republika Srpska are one. Today, the international community is not witnessing a surprise, but is merely reaping the logical outcome of its own opportunism and policy of appeasement, as it watches former nationalist narratives turn into a tangible political and territorial reality.